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CHRISTIANITY

HOW FAR

IT IS, and IS NOT,

FOUNDED ON

ARGUMENT.

(Price Sixpence.)



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BEING

The CONTROVERSY between the AUTHOR
of *Christianity not founded on Argument*,
and his OPPOSERS, adjusted, and set in a
clear Light.

By ROBERT SEAGRAVE, A.M.

— sunt certi denique fines,
Quos ultra, citraque, nequit consistere rectum.

HOR.

L O N D O N:

Printed for R. HETT, and J. OSWALD, in
the Poultry. 1743.

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ARGUMENT

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THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE
OF CHRISTIANITY, AND ITS
AND ITS ORIGIN, AND ITS
IN A



BY ROBERT SAMPSON, A.M.

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CHRISTIANITY

HOW FAR

It is, and is not, founded on
ARGUMENT.



HERE are very few Controversies, wherein the Writers on both Sides are not in some Respects in the right. We seldom meet with a Debate, either political or religious, but the Case is thus circumstanc'd.

This appears (to me at least) the Situation of a Dispute, lately agitated amongst us, concerning *Christianity*, its not being founded upon Argument, according to one Author; or, according to others, its Evidences being entirely rational.

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Though it would not be just to assert a middle Way, merely for the Sake of a Compromise, or to step into the probable Track at all Adventures, yet where the Line of Truth so falls, as I conceive it does in the Case before us, to mediate between the Contenders may perhaps bring the Matter to an Issue, and set it in a clear Light, for a general Usefulness. With this View, I take the Liberty to offer, in as concise a Manner as may be, the following Representation.

By the Term *Christianity*, I suppose we mean (tho' I could wish the Writers on this Subject had at their setting out ascertain'd their Idea of it, the *Scriptures* of the Old and New Testament, especially the latter; with such System of *Belief* and *Practice*, it may be the Duty of Mankind to form thereupon. Taking then Christianity to imply these several Considerations, the *Letter* of Christianity, being the outward Part, must be acknowledged absolutely founded on Argument. Its Appearance amongst Men comes recommended in such a Manner, that Reason, consistent with itself, cannot avoid receiving and embracing it. But the *Spirit* of Christi-

Christianity, the *Power*, the *Influence*, are not in the Reach of Reason: not receiv'd, or wrought by it. These must be attributed to a much *deeper* Original.

Upon what Ground of Observation concerning Nature this Distinction is built, with a Vindication of the *Equity* and *Wisdom* of Providence in its Appointments, I address myself to explain.

The *Letter of Christianity*, being the Records of the Old and New Testament, as a general Standard of Religion, does, I think, recommend and evidence itself to our Understanding *three* particular Ways. *First*, In regard a competent Testimony occurs to us, concerning its Genuineness and Antiquity. We meet with proper Proofs of its Authenticness, from the earliest Accounts of Time to the present Day; held forth by Persons of such Probity and Distinction, that an unprejudic'd Mind both may and ought to admit it. For Incredulity may be a Fault, and often is a Fault, as well as to be credulous. It is as much a Mark of Wisdom to be satisfied by a reasonable Evidence, as it is a Mark of Folly to believe every precipitate, or idle, Rumour.

A Cloud of Witnesses here present themselves, Persons of Learning and Character, various in Party and Complexion, through many successive Centuries, in different Countries and Tracts of the World, without any Shadow of Collusiveness, or Confederacy, oftentimes in different Interests, and in Support of different Judgments : It is well known these Conveyors of whatsoever Knowledge we can attain of past Times do agree in the Authority of the Scriptures, have refer'd to them, have appeal'd to them.

From this Concurrence of Testimony concerning Christianity its being *an authentic Composition* (we are not here considering the Merit of its several Particulars) there arises to the Mind that Evidence which creates what we call *a moral Certainty*. No Point of History, or Facts, at a Distance from us, is capable of other Evidence. Two Sorts of Assurance belong to our intellectual Faculty, experimental and moral, not experimental only. Experimental or philosophical Assurance can be had but in few Cases, exceeding few. He properly is a *Sceptic*, who believes Nothing, except whereof he hath philosophical Demonstration. And yet Gentlemen of this Cast find

find themselves obliged, in Variety of Cases, to take up with no better Assurances than their Neighbours; and do rely upon them with the Vulgar. Such indeed are the necessary Circumstances of human Society.

What Person, unless extremely sceptical, questions the Authenticness of *Sallust*, *Livy*, or *Herodotus*, with several other both Roman and Greek Historians? Who denies to *Virgil*, or *Homer*, the Works which pass under their Names: or the domestic Productions of Sir *Walter Raleigh*, and Lord *Clarendon*? I would ask the ingenious Author of *Christianity* not founded on Argument, what other Evidence besides traditional, he possesses (if not a Traveller) of there being such a Kingdom as *France*, or such a State as *Holland*? Nay, what other Assurance have many of us, that there are such Cities as *Edinburgh*, or *York*? In truth, most of the Points we take up, most of the Knowledge we reckon of in Life, rests on no other Foundation. I shall only remark farther on this Head, we have not a profane Composition in the World, which has an hundredth Part of the Testimony in its Favour, that attends the Sacred Volume.

Volume. It has *all in the Kind* that can be expected.

2. Let us now enquire into what may be esteem'd its Evidence *internal*.

Every Reader, who peruses the Holy Scriptures with a tolerable Attention, perceives in them a certain Majesty, and Force of Truth, that impresses him in a peculiar Manner, from what he meets in any other Book. Human Reason, tho' at present in corrupt Circumstances, cannot help discerning in the Scriptures *a Stamp of Divinity*. The Miracles there occurring with a Kind of easy Frequency, are evident Acts of an almighty Power. And they stand in such a Light, so seasonable, so merciful, so much to the Honour of the supreme Being, that our Mind is scarce at Liberty to dispute them: Those especially of a beneficent, and also instructive Nature (as they signify to us the Variety of Man's spiritual Diseases) which we observe in the New Testament. Every Capacity readily makes a Judgment, on Occasion of beholding the Miracles of the MESSIAH; *No Man can do the Things which thou doest, except God be with him*. Nothing of
this

this divine Benignity, and Power, adorns other Histories. No publick Instructor, no Founder of Laws, or Commonwealths, amongst the *Greeks*, or *Romans*, or any other Nation, have ever stood up with an Authority of this Nature.

Mahomet, the Compiler of the *Turkish* Alcoran, does indeed assert his Visions, and Revelations, and those very extraordinary ones truly, but the *Arab* is very modest on the Head of Miracles. *Mahomet* no where appears taking upon him to enforce Precepts, or prescribe and enact Laws by his personal Authority. The most he affects seems to be the Character and Dignity of a Prophet. The same Remark may be made, with regard to *Numa* amongst the *Latins*, or *Lycurgus* and *Solon*, Persons of high Esteem amongst the *Greeks*. Whereas, the Scriptures do speak to Mankind, and make their Claim, directly from Heaven, their Credentials come with them. The Finger of an almighty Power, a Dignity, a Force, a Simplicity appears which there is something in Nature that cannot help submitting to, and receiving. Even the *Jews*, with all their Hardness, did this Justice to the MESSIAH ; No Man ever spake
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like this Man. He taught as *One having Authority*, and not as *the Scribes*. Nature in its Perverseness to shun these Lights, and because it does not love Reproof, avoids Conversation with the Scriptures, as much as decently it can.

3. Who that hath Eyes doth not see, who that hath Ears does not hear a *Purity* and *Majesty* in the Sacred Writings, which human Authors in vain endeavour to imitate? No Circumlocution, no Obscurity. How directly do they give the Object! How sweetly do they affect, or with what Awfulness do they strike the Mind! What, for example, can equal that plain Diction, yet unparallel'd Sublimity, we meet with in the *first Chapter of Genesis*! *In the Beginning God created the Heavens, and the Earth. The Earth was without Form and void, and Darkness was upon the Face of the Deep. God said, Let there be Light, and there was Light.* So in the Gospel. *In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. God who at sundry Times, and diverse Manners, spake in Times past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last Days*

Days spoken to us by his Son. Christ the Wisdom of God, and the Power of God.

Every Person who gives himself Leave to observe these *inward* and *outward* Evidences of Christianity, may, I think, justly assent to the *Letter* of Christianity, that it is in general the Word of God. We have more Warrant for this Persuasion, than Mankind stands upon in various other Cases, which nevertheless they admit without the least Hesitation. Such Warrant, in brief, which a *wise Man*, unless he offers Violence to his Understanding, may and ought to acknowledge, consistently with all the Strictness of his Character. And so far *Christianity* is properly founded *upon Argument*.

I could be glad to say also, that human Nature is capable of being *argued* into a *right Faith*, or *Practice*; I could be glad to say, that the Heart of Man is capable of being render'd moral, or truly virtuous, by Argument. No Man ever yet received a right Faith through his Learning; nor was any Man, in my Opinion, ever yet argued into Honesty. Here then I must stop, in order to have my Eye on a different Foundation,

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because Nature stops here. Was I disposed to compliment Mankind, and offer Incense to the Taste of the Age, I might descant agreeably upon the *Rectitude of human Nature, innate Ideas of Right and Wrong, moral Relations*, with the eternal *Fitness or Unfitness* of Things. I readily acknowledge that something of these Ideas are remaining with Mankind, that is to say, there is a Shadow of Reason, a Shadow of the Religion of Nature, a Shadow of moral Relations, and so as to the rest; but I must be ignorant of the true State of Mankind, not to know, that the Substance is gone, the Substance hath left us long ago. I am not referring merely to a distant Transaction, let the Reader attend his own Experience, let him observe narrowly what passes in his own Mind, let him deduce his Judgment from what daily occurs in the usual Actions and Behaviour of the World about him. How is a Tree known to be the corrupt or uncorrupt but by its Fruits? How is a Fountain known whether sweet or bitter, but by the Taste of the Streams which flow from it? It is in vain to alledge, it *might* be better with Mankind, than we see; that a Disorder lies hid in the Springs of the World appears evident
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and indisputable from the Course of it. Whatsoever Regularity, or Virtue, might belong to Nature at its original Creation, 'tis evidently otherwise with it at present, according to the known Complaint, *I see the better things, but follow the worse.* At present we have no other Remainder of Nature's original Excellency, than what resembles those few Planks and Pieces, which are the Relicks of a Vessel, that has suffered Shipwreck at Sea. In some Cases a Man may swim a-shore on these; and in other Cases, when the Seas run high, and his Distance from Land is great, he may not. Or, have you beheld the Ruins of some magnificent Palace? you contemplate on this Occasion a melancholy Spectacle, broken Walls, and shatter'd Pillars, fair Cornishes, and fine carv'd Work defaced, Rubbish, and Caverns, the Refuge now of Toads and Serpents; and the Haunt of every noxious Beast. To Persons who make true Observations, what disagreeable Scenes of Hypocrisy, and Oppression, and Rapine, do fill the Histories of the World! Whence come these Corruptions, of every Day's Experience, in the *outward World*, but from Corruptions in *our little World within*? Whence but from the

Lusts, and Passions, and that Mystery of Self, which have their Seat in every Breast by Nature ?

Perhaps some will reply, these Disorders notwithstanding Man's Reason and Understanding continue clear, and are sufficient *possibly* to guide us better. To this I answer, I cannot judge of the inward State otherwise than by outward Effects. 'Tis to be fear'd, the Division made by several Writers, of a reasonable Soul into *Will*, *Affecti-
ons*, and a superior sovereign *Understanding*, is a Distinction without proper Ground. It escapes my Apprehension, how the Will and Affections can be acknowledg'd perverse (are they not Qualities of the same Soul?) and yet the Understanding be left uncorrupt. If you pour a Glais of Poison, or it may be a Drop, into a Fountain of Water, will one Part only of the Fountain be infected? Do you expect some Corner will remain untainted? No, the whole and every Part must be contaminated. If my Head akes, or my Hand is in pain, the whole Body will suffer with it.

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Were *Reason* and *Understanding* the clear Light, which some contend for, whence do these Gentlemen account for those various Judgments, and Opinions, in Points of no small Moment, which occur amongst Mankind? Whence such Contrariety, such Unsteadiness in the same Mind, such different Ideas of Right and Wrong, in different Ages, and Climates? Had the Taper of human Understanding never received a Shock at the Bottom, it would be found holding out *a steady and uniform Light, at all Times, and every where.*

'Tis easy and pleasant to imagine, that Reason is capable of forming, especially out of the Word of God, a right Faith, and of influencing a right Practice, yet when we weigh Facts it does not appear so. Is Faith then an unreasonable Thing? No. It suits itself with *right* Reason, but not Reason in its *present* Frame and Posture. Perhaps some will remark, you are about then to represent things, and yet tell us, we cannot comprehend them. Why, does not the Philosopher, and the Mathematician convince Mankind, that there exists Eternity and In-
finity,

finitude, and yet no Person can form any tolerable Idea, of one or the other ?

An hundred Articles might to be mentioned, of which our Rationalists themselves either do, or might acknowledge, their Ignorance. Faith (it will be explained what I understand by Faith presently) carries in it no Repugnance with Reason, more properly it is repugnant with a certain Wisdom, a carnal-petulant Wisdom which belongs to Nature, and is necessary to be cleared away before Religion can take any Place. A Gift of Grace, considered as a *supernatural Principle*, must form the Christian. Grace (a very significant Word tho' old-fashion'd) rectifies the Soul, brings it into a Frame of Submissiveness to the Divine Wisdom, lends it a fresh Bias, moulds it altogether a-new. In things of Immortality, Grace is right Reason, and right Reason Grace. Without this indwelling Principle, what Effects do we see of *mere Learning* and Capacity ? It is far from appearing, it is not so plain as the Noon-day, that the Learned have most Faith, and most Virtue. Do we not see in Fact, that Formality, Affectation, and Self, Irreligion, and Vice, do

predominant through all Ranks of Men from the highest to the lowest, in proportion to Opportunity, and the Prices which are offered for them. And yet who amongst us has not received the Letter of Christianity? Who does not *profess the Christian Religion*? We cannot say, on this Account, that the Generality of Men possess a *right* Faith, or that the Generality of Men are *real* Christians. With all the Candour I would be glad to put on, I cannot say this.

Most Persons have taken upon them the Profession of Christianity, many appear cloath'd with a Form of Sobriety and Virtue. Still to enter into the proper Faith of the Gospel, and to feel the Power of Virtue, is something much farther; an Effect of the Energy of the *divine Spirit*, who alone can renew our inward State, as he alone adjusted a confused *Chaos* at the Creation. Indeed Numbers have entertained in the Gross Articles of Belief, and perhaps will contend for them (much more than for Purity of Heart) not without considerable Danger to such, as shall be hardy enough to dissent from their Opinions. Perhaps in these Creeds, they will begin with asserting a Point to be incomprehensible,

hensible, and in the next Breath go about to explain it ; and which is worst of all, take upon them peremptorily to condemn, whosoever shall not agree to such Explanation. Such is the Pride of Learning. For my part, if I believe a Mystery, let it *continue* a Mystery.

In truth, the World labours under a Variety of contested Opinions, and oftentimes that *particular Faith* of the Gospel is least attended to, *which is most material*. In the *Evang-
elists*, in the *Acts* of the Apostles, and the *Epistles* of St. Paul, the Word Faith, I must take the Liberty to assert, generally means one especial Point ; that is, *to believe in the Merit, and Righteousness of Jesus Christ, instead of any thing of our own, for Salvation*. Mankind are apt to cast their Eye upon other speculative Truths, whilst this escapes them. I apprehend the Gospel not so much a Mystery in Speculation, as it is a Mystery of Free-grace, a Mystery of redeeming Mercy, a Mystery of Wisdom and Power ; concerted in the divine Counsels, in Behalf of Creatures, otherwise absolutely ruined, and undone. Here perhaps several Readers will object, this appears too easy a Way of Salvation to be credited. Not so easy, my Friend,

Friend, as it may seem to be. Very few Persons are persuaded they stand in need of a Redemption of this Kind. Most esteem themselves not so evil, and wicked, as many others. Every Man by Nature is the *Pharisee* we read of in the Gospel, who, tho' he justified himself, did not go home justified by his Maker. Others, again, propose to repent, and reform themselves by and by. Both the *Pharisee* and *immoral Liver* depend upon a Virtue of their own, either present or to come. Neither of them are yet convinc'd of their Insufficiency: Neither of them yet humbled, and broken enough; not yet possess'd of an acceptable saving Faith. Such Acquisition is not the easiest, yes, rather 'tis the hardest thing in the World.

It frequently comes to pass, that mere *Moralists* (not a little tainted with Bigotry) are fuller of Prejudice, and more inclined to Virulency and Persecution, than notorious Sinners; and in some Sense more distant from Conversion: *Publicans* and *Harlots* enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, into the Gospel-state, before such.

A *Species* of Morality corrupt Nature can attain, a *Morality of the Letter*. Several Persons appear to themselves, and perhaps to others, Keepers of the Decalogue in almost every Article, that is, so far as they can go in a Conduct which refrains from outward Violations. But how is it with the Heart? Does Truth rule there? Alas! the Heart in Distinction from the outward Man, till new-moulded by a Divine Power, is a Breaker of *every* Commandment, nay, is an Hater of the Commandment, doing nothing except thro' Fear and Bondage. The Letter of Scripture cannot reach it, 'tis only a Letter. This may sometimes affect the Conscience, but never *alters* the Heart.

Again; a Person *cannot comprehend the Meaning* of several Passages in Scripture, till they are opened by the Spirit. It is a seal'd Book, absolutely lock'd up from him. What Idea, or Apprehension, can Nature itself form of such Passages as these?

Except a Man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the

the Flesh, is Flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit, is Spirit. [John iii. 3 and 6.]

I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever ; Even the Spirit of Truth, whom the World cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him, &c. [John xiv. 16 and 17.]

Where is the Wise ? Where is the Scribe ? Where is the Disputer of this World ? [1 Cor. i. 20.]

The natural Man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are Foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. [1 Cor. ii. 14.]

The Reader must excuse me, whilst I mention a few more Passages ; after which I shall offer such Remarks upon them, as may be pertinent to the Argument in hand. That it is not in the Power of Nature to believe acceptably, or fall upon that proper Faith, which yields an Entrance into the Gospel, our Saviour declares, where he says,

No Man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him. No Man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. [John vi. 44 and 65.]

No Man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. [1 Cor. xii. 3.]

————— *Ministers of the New Testament, not of the Letter, but of the Spirit : for the Letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth Life.*
[2 Cor. iii. 6.]

Once more, let us hear the Scripture declaring the Necessity of a *Renewal*, or *Change* in Man's Heart.

The carnal Mind is Enmity against God : for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be. [Rom. viii. 7.]

You hath he quickned who were dead in Trespases and Sins, Wherein in Time past ye walked according to the Course of this World, according to the Power of the Prince of the Air, the Spirit that now worketh in the Children of Disobedience. [Eph. ii. 1 and 2.]

Examine

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the Faith; prove your own selves: Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be Reprobates. [2 Cor. xiii. 5.]

If any Man be in Christ, he is a new Creature. Old things are past away, behold, all things are become new. [2 Cor. v. 17.]

It cannot be denied, that the Intention of these Passages is to intimate two Points: The Inability of Man to conceive a proper Faith; and the Estrangement of the Soul from real Virtue, till rectify'd and restor'd by the *Holy Spirit*. And how otherwise can we account for that Inadvertency about Faith, and that general Defect in Practice, which abound amongst us? The Understanding by Nature, provided we believe the Scripture, has no Eye for the Things of God, howsoever acute, or penetrating in those of common Life. Neither has it a sufficient Influence on the Will, and Affections, to preserve the inferior Faculties, as they are usually call'd, in Order. There appears in the Passions a Refractoriness, no proper Connection, no friendly Communication between
them

them and Reason. We talk of Reason ; but 'tis only Talk. When there arises a Debate amongst the Inhabitants of the Regions, 'tis Affection, 'tis Habit, 'tis Gratification which determines it. Writers, indeed, in describing the Soul, attribute to the *Understanding* the Distinction of the Superior Faculty, whilst the Will, and Affections are term'd the Inferior Ones. But I fear in this Case, the Understanding is merely complimented. She has a Title confer'd upon her, (perhaps of Queen) without an Estate. Tho' she has a Right to Supremacy, Invaders come and take it away. If we look narrowly into Mankind, daily Experience will verify this Remark. In my Opinion, Mankind are govern'd, more truly by the Passions, than by the Understanding. The Servants, that should be, are got into their Master's Place : The Servants ride, and Princes walk on foot. It does not signify, what Precepts Men hear, or what they should be, or what they profess ; how do they *act* ? how do they *live* ?

Notwithstanding the Arguments of a learned Writer, in the Controversy before me, I cannot attribute so much to Instruction,
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nor yet to a religious Education, as some Gentlemen seem to do. As Irreligion undoubtedly abounds in the World, so also 'tis to be fear'd, with many others who bear the Character of Sobriety, there is too frequently a *Form* of Godliness without the *Power*. Was I, as a Divine, to represent the *Agency of the Spirit only necessary to CONFIRM Faith, and QUICKEN Obedience*, [see a late Pamphlet, entitled, *The Perspicuity and Stability, &c.* p.9.] I should reckon it an extraordinary Slip of my Pen. To confirm what? Does the Doctor apprehend a saving Faith was there *before*, in Youths religiously educated, only wanting to be strengthened and habituated? Or, had real Obedience taken place *before*, now at length favour'd with the friendly Assistance of the Spirit to quicken and further it? No sure. The *Agency of the Spirit* should be acknowledg'd necessary to *begin* Faith, to *begin* Obedience. Yes, provided we speak consistently, *to begin, to carry it on, and to perfect it.*

I am sorry to see, in the present Age, such inadvertent Symbolizing with *Roman Catholicks*. These professedly assert the *Powers of Free-will* (who denies them, so far as they can go?)
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And on this single Foundation stands the whole Fabrick of Popery. This Point is more properly the Distinguishment, and Error, of Popery, than *Transubstantiation* and *Idolatry*. So at least our old Protestants were wont to judge:

It is also to be lamented, that our establish'd *Clergy* have almost universally fallen upon the same moral Scheme. About a Century ago, the Necessity of a supernatural Principle, whereby to believe and practise aright, was asserted with as much Generality in our Pulpits, as the Doctrine of human Ability forms the Language of the present Day. How Ministers can accommodate the moral Scheme with their Articles, Subscriptions, and Catechisms, exceeds my Comprehension.

How shocking must it appear, and probably the true Inlet of Infidelity, for Persons to subscribe one thing, and to preach directly another ! Or what Regard can be given to the Outcries of a Layman, against a supernatural Principle, as errant *Enthusiasm*, after he has been Praying at Church
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in Words of this Nature, *Grant, O God, that by thy holy INSPIRATION we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful Guiding may perform the same.* Or, according to another Passage. *O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the Prayers of thy People, which call upon thee, and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have GRACE and POWER faithfully to fulfil the same, through Jesus our Lord.* [Common-prayer Book.]

Is it not evident what Numbers of Christians we have, (excellent Christians indeed!) who have really no Ideas? They assent to, and use a Form of Words, *with little or no Meaning* in them. If all such Religion be not *vain*, and *insufficient*, I have no Idea of Vanity.

When Reveal'd Religion visits the Mind, not in *Word* only, but with Power, for such Distinction the Scripture itself intimates; then, and not till then, it enlightens the Understanding, purifies the Heart, and gives Seriousness, and Solidity. Till which Time Persons possess nothing, except Prejudice, and Superstition. They trust Education,
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and Custom, at all Adventures ; they dare not give way to a Discussion of their Principles ; no, they have not Courage to do it. They are wrapt up, and inclos'd as in a Cittadel, tho' it be really a Dungeon, destitute both of Light, and Liberty. Such must needs call real Knowledge *Novelty* and *Enthusiasm*. Nature will stand in her own Defence ; but happy is it for Nature when she is driven out of her strong Holds.

Again. There may be Persons brought up in a right Scheme, as I, or another in my Way of Thinking, would term it ; and still, in case it be the Effect of Education, and not inwrought by the Spirit of God, it turns to no Avail. There is as much Difference between an inwrought Faith, and inwrought Virtue, and what frequently passes under these Denominations, as there is between *Light in the Head* and *Warmth in the Heart*. As much Difference as between a *Picture* and *Life*. The Scripture in itself, is Paper and Writing. An historical or preceptive Exhibition, but not Life, till made Life in the Soul. Do you perceive any Smell in a painted *Flower* ? or Taste in the most delicious

cious *Fruits*, so far as they are the Productions only of a curious Pencil? You have seen the Picture of a *Fire*. What a beautiful, and chearful *Assemblage* presents itself! A Structure of Materials agreeably lighted; in the Center an intense ruddy Glow, the lambent Flames play vigorously in every Part, you would think them in Motion, Perhaps you remark standing near it *an hoary old Gentleman*, the emblematical Figure of Winter; observe with what Satisfaction he spreads his Hands towards the Fire: he warms himself, he smiles, and is glad. But is he *really glad*, or *really warm*? No, here is nothing but *Paint* and *Canvas*, if you touch him with your Finger, he's as cold as Ice.

Just so is the old Man of human Nature unaffected with the Scriptures, till we are brought into *spiritual Life*, and the Scriptures *realized* to us.

To receive the Faith of the Gospel, requires not Learning so properly, as the bowing and humbling of the Mind, to accept, instead of any thing in us, the Offer of an imputed Merit. How frequently do Mini-

sters overlook this Point ! If they preach Morality, what is that ? They may preach Morality near as well out of *Seneca*, or *Plato*. They have no Occasion to take a Text for it out of the Gospel. Most of the Order at present cannot be reputed other than *Ministers of the Letter*. And is the Letter of Christianity then of no Signification ? Yes, a great deal. Even the Letter has a Benefit belonging to it. It restrains Mankind in some Degree. From the common Topick of Rewards and Punishments, it puts a Bridle on Mankind. It serves Purposes of civil Society, which respects Men's outward Actions, and Deportment, but has no Necessity of being solicitous about their inward Frames. Ecclesiastical Persons keep the World in some tolerable Decorum. They are Instruments of an inferior Good. They resemble the *Gibeonites* amongst the Children of *Israel* of old, who serv'd as *Hewers of Wood*, and *Drawers of Water*. Except that sundry are rather too largely paid.

Religion contributes to the Advantage of Society, whether it be real or nominal. Reality is best, yet nominal is preferable to none
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at all. It lays a Restraint upon the Passions of Nature, which otherwise would burst out into Violence, and Confusion. These would be found unsufferable, were the Reins laid in their Neck. It is best that unruly Nature be kept within Bounds, howsoever against its Will. Hence Government is ordained, and proper Obedience due to it. The Letter of Religion serves very considerably all these Views. And this vindicates the Wisdom of Providence in the Appointment of it, tho' it should not prove useful to all Men in spiritual Respects. God never leaves himself without Testimony, especially if we consider farther, that the Letter of *Christianity* is a standing Provision *for the Conversion, and Enlightening* of daily larger Numbers. It is ever capable of becoming spiritual. The Existence of Light is a Blessing, tho' all have not yet an Eye to receive it. Eventually the Holy Scripture contains all Light, and all Salvation. It is frequently, it is every Day, an Instrument to some, or other. Faith comes by hearing ; and 'tis certain to the End of the World, that Numbers shall be added to the One Spiritual Church, of such as shall be effectually sav'd.

Conver-

Conversions oftentimes arise under Ministries of the least Expectation: not merely under Ministries of Learning, and fine Parts. When true Knowledge, and Reformation have appear'd in any Part of the World, *it has generally been with considerable Variation from establish'd Modes.* Reformations may be look'd for again, when *Prejudice* vanishes away, and *Bigotry* loses its Hold, when Men venture to judge for themselves, and find their Hearts once fairly unlock'd.

Happy will be the Posture of the World, when *Custom* loses its Sway, when the Interpositions of mere Authority shall cease, and *every Party shall throw away its Idols.* In what Age these Contingencies will appear, is a good deal out of my Reach to determine.

I have only to add in Relation to the Controversy, which occasion'd these few Sheets, that probably I shall not interest myself any farther in it. 'Tis not my Disposition to write much. The Reader is heartily welcome either to his Approbation, or Dislike,
of

of any thing I have written. It would be a Pleasure to me, if I have suggested any thing, that may tend to render Persons consistent with themselves; and might induce them to be *thorough Protestants*, or Assertors of the Fundamentals of *Popery*: Abettors of *Human Reason*, or of *Reveal'd Religion* according to the *intrinsic Meaning* and *real Extent* of the Words.

F I N I S.

Erratum. In pag. 19. lin. 1. for *predominant* read *predominate*.



(33)

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